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Summary record of the 5th meeting
Held at Headquarters, New York, on Thursday, 5 October 2017, at 3 p.m.

Chair: Mr. Ramirez Carreño ..... (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela)

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The meeting was called to order at 3.15 p.m.

Agenda item 62: Implementation of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples (*Territories not covered under other agenda items*) (*continued*)

Hearing of petitioners (*continued*)

1. **The Chair** said that, in line with the Committee's usual practice, petitioners would be invited to take a place at the petitioners' table, and all would withdraw after making their statements.

Question of the Turks and Caicos Islands (A/C.4/72/6)

2. **Mr. Roberts** (Turks and Caicos Forum) said that the Turks and Caicos Islands had recently been devastated by two hurricanes within a fortnight, with 75 per cent to 90 per cent of homes and businesses destroyed on the major islands. There was an acute food and water shortage, and businesses, including hotels, were only slowly reopening. Given that the Turks and Caicos Islands had been colonial appendages of the United Kingdom since the late 1700s, the British Royal Marines and other military personnel had been assisting with recovery by maintaining law and order, helping with clean-up, and providing food and water. The British must be commended for such actions, especially since they had been woefully absent in the aftermath of previous natural disasters, and had failed to provide any assistance, either physical or financial.

3. The Fourth Committee and the United Nations must give as much assistance as possible to his country, as the Islands were experiencing unprecedented difficulties, many of them due to pervasive negligence on the part of its administering Power. Bodies of illegal immigrants from poverty-stricken neighbouring countries had washed ashore on the Turks and Caicos Islands because the British had neglected to protect the border integrity of his Territory, as called for in the Constitution of the Territory and in agreed international conventions. The Territory had also witnessed an explosion in crime, unchecked by British forces. More than one tourist had been shot and killed, thereby threatening Territorial reliance on tourism.

4. **Mr. Arcia Vivas** (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela) asked the petitioner how the control that the administering Power maintained over the political administration of the Turks and Caicos Islands affected their ability to recover from such natural disasters, and to advance towards self-determination more generally.

5. **Mr. Rivero** (Cuba), expressing solidarity with all the Territories that had been affected by the recent hurricanes, asked the petitioner what the administering Power must do to further assist with recovery efforts.

6. **Mr. Roberts** (Turks and Caicos Forum), responding to the representative of Venezuela, said that after previous natural disasters, the administering Power had generally told his country it was on its own. Britain was, however, currently helping with the recovery efforts, as indicated. Its Government had pledged £32 million pounds for recovery in all its Overseas Territories in the Caribbean the British Virgin Islands, Anguilla and the Turks and Caicos Islands — but that would be woefully inadequate for even one of them.

7. In answer to the representative of Cuba, he explained that his Territory had few resources of its own when dealing with natural disasters and thus had to rely almost completely on the United Kingdom. Because it would still be a lengthy recovery process, the United Kingdom must continue to provide assistance in that regard. It should be noted, in any case, that Cuba was the best source of information about hurricane mitigation efforts in the Western world, and his country was thankful to have learned much from Cuba in the past.

Question of Western Sahara (A/C.4/72/7)

8. **Mr. Lecoq**, speaking in his personal capacity as a Deputy in the French National Assembly, said that as the last colonized Territory in Africa, Western Sahara had entrusted its future to the United Nations when it had agreed to the 1991 ceasefire between the two parties to the dispute. Since then, however, the Territory had fallen victim to the inertia of the United Nations system and to realpolitik. The most cynical explanation for international hesitation was that the situation was beneficial to Morocco, which continued to exploit the subsoils and fishing resources of the Territory. Certain large multinational corporations were also complicit, taking advantage of the uncertainty to pillage resources for profit. The Court of Justice of the European Union had ruled against the Moroccan exploitation of Western Saharan resources in December 2016 but many products from the Sahara still circulated in Europe.

9. Independent experts had confirmed that Sahrawi political prisoners had been arbitrarily imprisoned and subject to degrading treatment and torture by Moroccan authorities. The situation of chronic injustice and mass unemployment among the Sahrawi population, coupled with the neighbouring instability in the Sahel region and deplorable living conditions in the refugee camps in Algeria, could easily cause the situation to tip over into violence. The United Nations could not, therefore, abstain from action. He called upon all countries,

including France, to respect United Nations resolutions so that the people of Western Sahara could achieve freedom and equality.

10. **Mr. Vaccari** (Italian Senator and member of the Parliamentary Intergroup of Solidarity with the Saharawi People) said that his group sought to raise awareness in Italy about the human rights violations committed against the Sahrawi people in Western Sahara and to promote support for their right to self-determination.

11. Morocco, having raised countless obstacles in the past to the referendum on Western Sahara, continued to perpetrate human rights abuses against its people. Its violations had been documented by independent observers such as Amnesty International and the Robert F. Kennedy Human Rights Foundation, despite a media blackout designed to avoid international scrutiny. In addition, Morocco persisted in illegally exploiting the natural resources of Western Sahara in violation of the Sahrawi people's sovereign rights, often doing so in complicity with foreign entities.

12. The world must not legitimize the status quo and must reject the illegal military occupation by Morocco. In 2015, an Italian parliamentary coalition had visited the Tindouf refugee camps and had witnessed first-hand the atrocious living conditions. It was hoped that the Secretary-General and his Personal Envoy for Western Sahara would help to restart dialogue between the parties involved.

13. **Mr. Bazaid** (Projektgruppe Westsahara), speaking as a journalist, a human rights activist and a Sahrawi, said that the people of Western Sahara had suffered human rights abuses for almost 37 years under Moroccan occupation. The number of human rights violations committed by Moroccan police officers, such as those against the Gdim Izik protestors, was increasing, according to Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International. The Secretary-General and the international community must take immediate action to stop such ongoing violations in the occupied Territory.

14. The decolonization process was not complete: although the Sahrawi people had placed their faith in the United Nations, they were still waiting for a referendum on self-determination. The United Nations must extend the mandate of the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO) so that it could address human rights abuses within the occupied Territory. It must also hold the promised referendum. Morocco should release all Sahrawi political prisoners and stop its exploitation of natural resources in Western Sahara.

15. **Mr. Fall** (Natural Resources Watch) said that Morocco in its occupation of Western Sahara was pursuing an economic policy based on short-term gain, thereby turning Sahrawis into a minority in their homeland. They were severely underrepresented in such local industries as fisheries, agriculture and phosphate mining, as either participants or beneficiaries. Those industries were operated and subject to military oversight by Morocco, in conjunction with a host of foreign companies that reaped enormous profits. After 40 years of occupation, the Territory had no universities and only two hospitals, and the vast majority of medical professionals and educators were Moroccan.

16. Thanks to the generosity of Algeria, the Sahrawis in the refugee camps had been able to lead their lives with dignity. However, many of the people's best and brightest in the Territory had been detained in Moroccan prisons for political reasons, their fate unknown. Most voters in the Moroccan-run elections in the Territory, which in any case were prohibited under international law, were Moroccan settlers. If there were indeed dozens of Sahrawis who would voluntarily choose to become Moroccan, the remainder should be allowed to decide for themselves. The occupying Power was the clear beneficiary of the ceasefire with the Frente Popular para la Liberación de Saguía el-Hamra y de Río de Oro (Frente Polisario). The Security Council must either set a date for the referendum or allow the Sahrawi people to claim its right to independence in terms that the occupier would understand, be it peacefully or by force.

17. **Mr. Barakat** (Algerian-American Association) said that the armies of successive colonial Powers had enslaved, plundered and oppressed the wretched, defenceless Sahrawi people, whose only desire had been to live with dignity. The relationship between Western Sahara and its current occupying Power, Morocco, had been a repressive one, as the Committee's visiting missions to Western Sahara had been able to attest. Since Morocco had the upper hand, it was manipulating the peace process, spreading falsehoods, biding its time and ultimately thwarting the Organization's attempts to resolve the conflict peacefully and defend the oppressed Sahrawi people. The Sahrawi side remained the only party to the conflict that had willingly and consistently sought dialogue as a first choice and that had avoided taking any action that might hinder the United Nations mandate. It was therefore incumbent upon the United Nations to resolve the question of Western Sahara with the same zeal it had demonstrated in countless other situations, taking the strong moral stance needed.

18. **Mr. Yara** (Western Sahara IT) said that Morocco was illegally occupying Western Sahara and had killed and abused many Sahrawis during its occupation. As a

Sahrawi, he could attest that the Government had deliberately targeted young children with a view to changing their views of their own history. It had also prevented the media from reporting on abuses against the Sahrawis by jailing journalists and human rights activists.

19. The people of Western Sahara had been promised a referendum which had never happened. In the meantime, Morocco had divided families and exploited all of the region's natural resources, including phosphate, fish and sand. Its Government had lobbied many governments and bodies, including the United States and the African Union, in order to reduce support for the Sahrawi people. International lawmakers and the United Nations had done nothing to prevent yet another generation from perishing: a referendum was urgently needed.

20. **Mr. Roa** (Going Organic Western Sahara) said that on a visit to the refugee camps in 2014 in connection with an organic gardening project in Smara, he had concluded that the Sahrawis lacked the essential freedom to choose their own path and to speak without their lives being in danger.

21. The violent actions taken against Sahrawi activists, most notably the Gdim Izik protestors, were cruel, unfair and largely politically motivated. Independent international observers had remarked on the extremely harsh prison sentences given to protestors and decried the lack of sufficient evidence.

22. Efforts designed to achieve economic development were currently hindered by the lack of opportunities afforded the Sahrawis, placing them at a disadvantage in the global economic market. The constraints upon them were, in fact, visible in all facets of society.

23. The United Nations must undertake a new visiting mission and shift its strategy towards a more effective peacebuilding process. The lack of media coverage given to the question and of attention from the international community was astonishing. The Sahrawi people should be given the chance to work towards a prosperous future and to heal from the wounds of the past.

24. **Mr. Lygeros**, speaking in his personal capacity as a university professor, said that no dictatorship could truly represent its people, as representation must be freely selected. From its inception, the Frente Polisario had exhibited no desire to truly represent the people of the Sahara, instead using that claim as a pretext for exploiting financial and diplomatic resources. As an entity, the Frente Polisario was an ideological misconception. It had become increasingly clear that it did not care about the region's inhabitants; its main function now was to create local friction and to destabilize the region as a whole. The Saharan people had long ago stopped expecting anything from the Frente Polisario, which would never have been viable without its hidden funding. The people, who were already free as inhabitants of Morocco's southern provinces, had their own representatives who did not have anything to do with the Frente Polisario.

25. The fact that Morocco had rejoined the African Union pointed the way towards a specific, viable solution. The Frente Polisario was a relic of the past, and the people of the Sahara would be free only when the Frente Polisario ceased to exist.

26. **Mr. Lakhrif** (Member of the Moroccan House of Councillors) said that he had been elected to the Moroccan Parliament by the voters of Laayoune, who expected him to speak for them in a democratic and transparent fashion. Having himself been born and bred in the Sahara, he had the right to represent the Saharan people. The so-called leaders of the Frente Polisario could not speak for the Saharan people, for no one had ever elected them. The Frente Polisario did not represent him, the Saharan people living in the Moroccan Sahara or those living in the Tindouf camps.

27. The Moroccan autonomy initiative of 2007, which the international community had recognized as viable and credible, offered the best solution to the Saharan dispute and would put an end to the suffering of the families in the Tindouf camps. It would also guarantee that those Saharans could fully enjoy their rights and lead lives of dignity, returning to their country and contributing to new development projects in the region.

28. **Mr. Jensen** (Former Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Western Sahara and Head of the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO)) said that after years of inaction, much had changed in the previous 18 months. There had been a growing threat of armed conflict in the region and beyond. The confrontation between Morocco and the Frente Polisario in the buffer zone at Guerguerat had seemed poised to become violent, and had been defused only after months of negotiations and pressure from both the Secretary-General and the Security Council. Another new development had been that in 2017, Morocco had rejoined the African Union after 33 years and renewed its commitment to Africa.

29. The recently appointed Secretary-General had issued an unusually comprehensive and compelling report (S/2017/307) that was fully informed on the relevant issues, including the failure to conduct a census

in the refugee camps. The report had been followed by unanimously adopted Security Council resolution 2351 (2017) on the subject. As both the report and resolution emphasized, the negotiating process must be imbued with a new spirit, aimed at reaching a mutually acceptable political solution, including agreement on the nature and form of the exercise of self-determination. Algeria and Mauritania must contribute to the process. The Secretary-General had appointed a new Personal Envoy for Western Sahara to help restart talks.

30. It was pointless to resurrect old settlement plans or repeat the same arguments. A genuinely new spirit of compromise must prevail, accompanied by a willingness to explore what options there could be following the regional autonomy plan proposed in 2007. The preferred positions of either side would not be accepted: compromise was inescapable and inaction was dangerous. It was the moment for political leaders to show themselves to be statesmen, and for the Committee to encourage that to happen.

31. **Mr. Haidara** (Fédération mondiale des amis du Sahara marocain) said that the efforts made by Morocco over four decades to resolve a regional conflict that dated back to the Cold War era had culminated in its autonomy plan for the Sahara region, which had been welcomed by the United Nations and benefited the local population. In particular, its subsequent advanced regionalization initiative aimed to improve the socio-political and economic conditions of the local population and was based on its full participation. The Moroccan Government would invest over $8 billion under its new development model for the southern provinces, from 2016 to 2020, making them a hub between Africa and Europe. Significant electoral turnout among Moroccans in the southern provinces attested to their support for government measures and to their defence of the territorial integrity of Morocco. The Saharan question should be approached not simply as a Moroccan issue but primarily as one of guaranteeing the integrity of an African population, alongside efforts to promote democracy and the rule of law. It was time to put an end to the futile diplomatic and political dance around the so-called question of Western Sahara, which had been none other than the Moroccan Sahara since the dawn of time, as demonstrated by the culture and customs that the people of the region shared with the rest of the country. His organization stood ready to thwart any attempt to undermine the territorial integrity of Morocco.

32. **Mr. Razama** (Mayor of El Marsa, Laayoune), speaking as Chair of the Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence of the Moroccan Parliament, said that the return of Morocco to its rightful place in the African Union had ended a bitter 38-year standoff, during which the country had protested the organization's recognition of the so-called Saharan Arab Democratic Republic, in violation of African Union instruments. In July 2016, a majority of African Union member States had called for the Union to suspend the membership of the so-called republic. At the African Union Summit in January 2017, 47 of 54 African States had endorsed the unconditional resumption by Morocco of its membership. The few nations opposing Moroccan membership were fully aware that its return to the African Union would mean that the days of the spurious republic's membership were numbered. To date, only 32 States Members of the United Nations, most of them authoritarian regimes and with not a single major Power among them, recognized the fictional Saharan republic, and the vast majority of African States supported the abrogation of its African Union membership. The fallacies must end.

33. **Mr. Postiglione**, speaking in his personal capacity as a freelance journalist, said that a number of cases highlighted in a book he had recently published illustrated how the Western Sahara dispute and the Frente Polisario might contribute to destabilizing the entire Sahara. The Frente Polisario appeared unable to prevent mobsters and jihadists from infiltrating some of the camps under its control, while Sahrawi young people, poor and disillusioned with the corrupt Frente Polisario establishment, were being seduced by the jihadist discourse against corruption. The kidnapping, for instance, of an NGO worker at Frente Polisario headquarters, where she should have been safe, indicated that links might exist between Frente Polisario officials and jihadist armed groups operating in the region between Mali and Algeria. Moreover, the 2010 arrest by Mauritanian police officers of drug traffickers included one individual suspected of being the link between the Frente Polisario, Al-Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb and major smuggling networks. All the evidence seemed to indicate that the Frente Polisario was losing its much-touted ability to remain impervious to terrorist infiltration as a result of the changing political landscape, the loss of economic support under Qadhafi and the omnipresence of Islamic fundamentalist movements.

34. **Ms. Ramos** (American Association of Jurists) said that Western Sahara was a Non-Self-Governing Territory illegally occupied by Morocco since 1975. As a colonized people, the Sahrawis had the inalienable right to exercise self-determination, on the basis of the Declaration on decolonization. The International Court of Justice had in an advisory opinion at the time rejected the sovereignty claims made by Morocco over the

Territory; and various legal opinions on Western Sahara issued in the ensuing decades by the United Nations, the African Union and the Court of Justice of the European Union had condemned the exploitation of the natural resources of Non-Self-Governing Territories without the consent of their people as a usurpation of their legitimate rights. Her organization endorsed the 1990 United Nations Settlement Plan for Western Sahara, and decried both the human rights violations to which Sahrawi political prisoners were subjected in the Territory and the humanitarian situation of the 160,000 inhabitants of the Tindouf refugee camps.

35. **Mr. ben Abdelayachi Heiba** (Chambre de la pêche maritime Atlantique-Sud) said that the previous month, a 90-year-old enslaved man had died of severe dehydration in unclear circumstances in the Tindouf camps after a life of servitude, discarded by the family in whose service he had toiled. A courageous Saharan journalist who had met the elderly man two months earlier had related the incident in an attempt to break the silence surrounding it. It was odd that such tragedies were commonplace in a society of revolutionaries and that they typically met with apathy because the victim was black and no longer of any use to his masters. The spread of slavery in the Tindouf refugee camps had been denied by the Frente Polisario, whose routine response to such allegations consisted of distortions and outright lies.

36. White-skinned residents of the Tindouf camps neither greeted nor sat at the same table with black-skinned residents, to whom they referred pejoratively, and slave-owning fathers bequeathed their slaves to their sons. Moreover, slaves were freed by means of an official document signed by the so-called Ministry of Justice of the Frente Polisario. The elderly slave who had died of thirst was first and foremost a human being worthy of respect regardless of the colour of his skin and a Saharan citizen with rights. There had to be an investigation to ascertain the causes of his death and to expose the existence of slavery in the Tindouf camps. The high-ranking Frente Polisario officials and their entourage should show some shame when holding forth about human rights and equality in international forums.

37. **Ms. Bossoula** (Association Femme) said that the previous month, a resident of the Tindouf refugee camps had written a letter to the so-called Sahrawi Red Crescent requesting an explanation for the refusal to grant camp residents refugee cards. According to the letter, a group of Saharan young people, sent to South America by the Frente Polisario to study and receive military training, had sought asylum at an airport in Spain but had been rejected by the Spanish authorities. The Frente Polisario considered their asylum request to be an act of rebellion. The letter indicated that the young people seeking asylum in Spain would have been spared the restriction on their movement and the humiliation had they been granted refugee cards, which would have conferred United Nations protection upon them.

38. In order to have refugee cards issued to the camp inhabitants, it would be necessary to conduct a census of the camp population, a measure recommended by the United Nations and one insisted upon by Morocco. However, the Frente Polisario and its masters categorically refused to open the doors of the camps to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) to conduct the census because the actual population was far smaller than the number reported in requests for international aid, making it possible to profit from the sale of aid outside the camps. Moreover, declaring the real number of camp residents would further undermine the legitimacy of the Frente Polisario's claim to be the sole representative of the Sahrawi people. Refugee cards would allow freedom of movement, a prospect that frightened the Frente Polisario. The real culprit behind that peculiar state of affairs was not the Frente Polisario but Algeria, which hosted the refugee camps.

39. **Mr. Biagioli** (Mayor of Calenzano, Italy), speaking on behalf of some 300 Italian institutions that had signed a friendship pact with the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic, said that the Sahrawi people as a whole had been deprived of the right to self-determination, and some were relegated to the Tindouf refugee camps in overcrowded, unsanitary conditions. The proximity of Western Sahara to smuggling routes and areas in which transnational terrorist groups operated only made matters worse in an already volatile region. The security considerations were therefore just as pressing as the decolonization issue. The United Nations Settlement Plan had offered a viable solution by providing for a referendum that would allow all the people of Western Sahara to choose their political future. However, they had awaited the Security Council-endorsed referendum for over three decades, waging a remarkably peaceful struggle for their rights, unlike the country that maintained a 270-kilometre mined berm in the Territory.

40. Western Sahara remained in need of a lasting diplomatic solution. The current stalemate undermined the prestige of international institutions and constituted a defeat of international law, which must be respected if global peace was to prevail. The time had come to engage with the Security Council in order to resolve the matter in accordance with the Charter. A new approach could be found by considering the question of Western Sahara under Chapter VII of the Charter instead of

Chapter VI, taking action with respect to breaches of the peace and acts of aggression. He looked forward to the day when the Sahrawi flag would fly at the United Nations.

41. **Mr. Leite** (International Platform of Jurists for East Timor), speaking also on behalf of the Stichting Zelfbeschikking West-Sahara, said that numerous international law experts considered the cases of Timor-Leste and Western Sahara to be strikingly similar. Several Timorese leaders had voiced their solidarity with the Sahrawi cause. At the twenty-fifth anniversary conference of the International Platform of Jurists for East Timor, the former head of the Timorese resistance against the Indonesian occupation of Timor-Leste had affirmed that it was only a matter of time before Western Sahara was liberated. The Court of Justice of the European Union had also expressed strong support for that cause in a recent decision highlighting that the status of Western Sahara was separate and distinct from that of Morocco. Welcoming the forceful statement made recently before the plenary Assembly by the French President in favour of respect for the rule of law, human rights and international humanitarian law, he expressed the hope that MINURSO would be capable of monitoring the human rights situation in the Territory.

42. **Mr. Bessedik** (Algeria) asked for more information on the commemoration of the twenty-fifth anniversary of the International Platform of Jurists for East Timor.

43. **Mr. Leite** (International Platform of Jurists for East Timor) said that the commemoration had taken place in the Portuguese Parliament and that two parliamentary Vice-Presidents had expressed important words of support for the Sahrawi cause.

44. **Mr. Romero** (Total News), speaking as a journalist and an international relations and security expert for his Argentine news agency, said that the refusal by the Frente Polisario and the Algerian authorities to conduct a census of the Sahrawi population in the Tindouf refugee camps, as recommended by UNHCR, was clearly motivated by the illegal profit derived by Frente Polisario leaders from overestimating the number of Sahrawis and systematically diverting humanitarian assistance. The misappropriation of humanitarian aid by the Frente Polisario leadership with impunity had been documented and condemned by UNHCR, the World Food Programme and a host of other organizations. The recent report of the European Anti-Fraud Office (OLAF) had exposed the diversion of aid perpetrated jointly by the Frente Polisario and the Algerian Red Crescent; most of the aid was stored, redistributed and sold in sub-Saharan African markets, and the proceeds of those sales, along with humanitarian monetary assistance from the European Union, had been used by corrupt Frente Polisario leaders to purchase weapons and real estate for themselves, while the camp population lived in subhuman conditions. He therefore urged the United Nations to denounce such gross mismanagement of humanitarian aid, demand that the Tindouf refugee camps open their doors to UNHCR delegations so that they could conduct a reliable census of the Sahrawi population and also oversee the creation of mechanisms to monitor the allocation of humanitarian assistance.

45. **The Chair** reminded petitioners that they must refrain from mentioning countries that were not on the agenda.

46. **Ms. Daoudi** (Sahara Media Centre) said that the so-called human rights violations in the Sahara served as the basis for the endless war waged against Morocco by the Frente Polisario and its sponsors. Their most recent propaganda campaign consisted of a barrage of lies concerning the Gdim Izik detainees. The depiction of those detainees as political prisoners omitted crucial details, namely, that the prisoners had slit the throats of 11 unarmed security forces, all young men in the prime of their lives, at the Gdim Izik camp and desecrated the soldiers' remains by bashing in their skulls and urinating on their corpses. Moreover, sizable weapons caches had been found in the possession of the assassins whom the Frente Polisario and its sponsors had characterized as mere peaceful demonstrators. She wondered whether the Frente Polisario would have the courage to explain the heinous murders of those 11 young men to the families they had left behind.

47. **Mr. Bessedik** (Algeria), noting with concern the unacceptable language used by the previous petitioner, said that his delegation hoped that the remaining petitioners would use language appropriate for United Nations proceedings.

48. **Mr. Sánchez Álvarez Castellanos** (Fenec-Design), speaking in his capacity as a former humanitarian aid worker, said that he had come before the Committee to denounce from personal experience the systematic and continuing diversion by Frente Polisario leaders of public funding for humanitarian projects in the Tindouf refugee camps. He named high-ranking Frente Polisario officials, unfortunately abetted at times even by two prominent Spaniards involved in development cooperation, who had been implicated in the lucrative industry of diverting monetary and food aid that had been donated on the basis of inflated numbers of beneficiaries; and a number of projects for which funding had been allocated had not been carried out. As

a director for years of a Spanish NGO financing school-related and agricultural projects in the camps, he himself had witnessed aid being diverted to pay Frente Polisario officials in cash and to fund their conferences. They had also devised a way to make a good profit from a scheme to send camp children on vacation outside Tindouf.

49. A more recent opportunity to travel throughout the southern provinces of Morocco as a photographer, and his subsequent decision to live permanently in Laayoune, had enabled him to observe first-hand the true situation of the Saharan population, who, for the most part, enjoyed a high standard of living under Moroccan rule, reaping the benefits of the Government's social policies in the region. Notwithstanding the fallacies propagated abroad by the Frente Polisario regarding human rights violations in the Sahara, it would ultimately be up to the Saharans to determine the future of the southern provinces of Morocco.

50. **Ms. Hammi** (Association Liberté et Fraternité) said that Morocco was fully convinced that the Sahara was its land and would not relinquish it at any cost. Nevertheless, Morocco had made painful concessions and sought reconciliation with its adversaries in the hope of finding a way out of the conflict. Several major Powers and the Security Council had welcomed the serious and credible proposals by Morocco to advance a settlement. The Frente Polisario was merely a tool controlled remotely by another Power. The question of the Sahara was so difficult to resolve because that Power rejected any solution that did not lead to the region's independence, determined as it was to achieve its strategic objectives, namely, to expand its borders, to secure a window on the Atlantic and to strangle and weaken Morocco, thereby becoming the only unrivalled Power in the region. The identity of the Power responsible for arming, funding, training and speaking on behalf of the Frente Polisario was known to all: it was Algeria.

51. **Mr. Mrabih Rabou** (Association Amis de Tarfaya) said that over the previous four years, the Moroccan Government had designed numerous development plans for the Sahara region to meet the needs expressed by its local population and their representatives. As a result, poverty had declined in the Sahara twice as quickly as it had at the national level, standing now at 6.5 per cent. It was a common misconception that Morocco was illegally exploiting the natural resources of the Sahara region without involving the local population or investing in the region. In financial terms, Morocco had invested far more than it had received from its exploitation of natural resources in the Sahara. Moreover, those activities fully involved and benefited the local population. Since rejoining the African Union, Morocco was moving forward with new development plans aimed at promoting the Sahara as an economic hub and a link between Morocco and the rest of the African continent, restructuring the exploitation of natural resources and investing in the creation of industrial complexes for fertilizer production, airports, roads and new towns with technologically advanced industrial facilities. Those projects would contribute to further reducing unemployment and illiteracy. As the general manager of a successful local company that employed over 70 Saharan employees, he personally attested to the fact that the successful implementation of regional development strategies hinged on the local population's productive contribution and expertise.

52. **Mr. Gil Garre** (International Security Observatory) said that terrorist activity by groups such as Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) and Al-Qaida had been intensifying in the Sahelo-Saharan region, and terrorist infiltration of the Frente Polisario was of particular concern. Characteristically abject methods of jihadist terrorism had been used in the notorious murders of 11 Moroccan public servants, whose throats had been slit and their bodies desecrated after their deaths, by Frente Polisario activists during the Gdim Izik camp revolts. In such an unstable context, there was a possibility of a return by the Frente Polisario to armed conflict. Jihadists would encourage and hijack such a conflict to further their own worldwide criminal ideology. It was imperative for the United Nations to take effective action in order to avoid such an escalation. In his view, all the parties involved wanted a solution to the Western Sahara dispute, which had been an artificial contrivance from the start; and if they reflected on the security situation they might find areas of common ground that could then underpin a larger resolution. Furthermore, Morocco had proposed a serious and credible autonomy plan, which provided a good basis for such an effort and for the social, economic and cultural development of the region that would be the best safeguard against outside violence.

53. **Mr. Zardini**, speaking in his personal capacity as an Argentine academic and economist, said that the Frente Polisario was conducting a disinformation campaign by convincing world opinion that Morocco was exploiting the natural resources of Western Sahara in contravention of international law and the interests of the local population. Yet Morocco was not an occupying Power since the southern provinces in the Sahara had historically been recognised as part of its territory. Thus, as a sovereign State, Morocco had an obligation under international law to set an economic strategy and a resource exploration policy for the benefit of all

Moroccans. Far from exploiting the region, Morocco had defined a development programme for the southern provinces and had invested large sums of money in order to overcome the region's colonial legacy of underdevelopment. In the meantime, the Frente Polisario was exploiting the suffering of Saharan refugees in the Tindouf camps to fuel a propaganda campaign intended to stall the attainment of a political solution.

54. **Ms. Chávez Cossío**, speaking in her personal capacity as a Peruvian academic, said that the Moroccan autonomy proposal for Western Sahara would be the best basis for achieving a definitive solution and that Morocco was the most legitimate representative of the Sahrawis for four reasons. First, demographically, most of the Sahrawis lived in Moroccan Sahara, with a small proportion being held as hostages by the Frente Polisario in the Tindouf camps in Algeria. Secondly, other than Morocco, no one was entitled to represent the Sahrawis. The spurious Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic proclaimed by the Frente Polisario and based in Algeria lacked any of the attributes of a sovereign nation and was not internationally recognized as such. As for the Frente Polisario itself, it was not recognized in United Nations resolutions as a national liberation movement or the sole legitimate representative; and the Court of Justice of the European Union had recently ruled against a claim by the Frente Polisario on the basis that it had no legal standing to represent the Sahrawi people. Thirdly, only Morocco had steadfast historical and legal ties with the Sahara region, as confirmed in an advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice; it was indeed Morocco that had called for its decolonization by Spain, long before the creation of the separatist Frente Polisario. Fourthly, Moroccan Sahara participated in the country's democratic elections.

55. **Mr. Cameron** (World Action for Refugees) said that it was essential to conduct a credible census to establish, once and for all, the true number of detainees in the Tindouf camps. For over 40 years, there had been multiple calls for such a census from UNHCR, the European Union and a string of NGOs yet the parties in control had refused. He suggested that the inflated numbers being put forward gave the Frente Polisario greater political legitimacy and resulted in larger amounts of aid to be embezzled and resold in commercial markets. Such confirmed racketeering, as well as the diversion even of aid that reached the camps, subverted the international community's ability to offer aid, with potentially catastrophic consequences for the camp population. Moreover, when key players in the conflict tried to conceal the truth, or actively opposed measures that would unveil it, it undermined their factual credibility altogether; yet facts, not propaganda, were needed to break the current gridlock of suffering.

56. **Mr. Grimblatt Hinzpeter** (Centro de Estudios del Magreb para las Américas), reviewing the history of the question of Western Sahara, said in particular that as soon as Morocco had gained independence it had called for the return of its Saharan region, then colonized by Spain. During the course of the relinquishment of the region by Spain, the International Court of Justice had held that there were pre-existing historical and legal ties between Morocco and the Saharan peoples. Subsequently, however, Algeria had tried to occupy parts of Moroccan Sahara in an attempt to gain Atlantic sea access; thus initiating armed conflict, the creation of the Frente Polisario and the Saharan Arab Democratic Republic, and decades of instability. Morocco had agreed to negotiations with the Frente Polisario under the aegis of the United Nations; but the United Nations Settlement Plan and the projected holding of a referendum to decide the fate of the Territory had foundered in the 1990s owing to the difficulties in identifying those eligible to participate in the referendum. Since 2000, the United Nations had been arguing rather for a negotiated political solution, and in 2007 Morocco had proposed a fair and realistic autonomy plan that was now favoured and had been welcomed by a great many countries.

57. **Mr. Hormatallah** (Association marocaine pour le développement d'Oued Eddahab), speaking as a Saharan citizen of Morocco living in Dakhla, said that the Frente Polisario and its protectors were falsely trying to convince the international community that Morocco was exploiting the wealth of the Sahara region, especially its phosphate and fish resources, when the area represented only an insignificant part of the nation's rich fish and phosphate reserves. Instead, via a $ 8-billion regional development project, Morocco was investing an amount far superior to the value of the natural resources in the Saharan region. That project was intended to boost development in all sectors, economic, social, cultural and environmental. It also promoted the participation of women in public life and the reintegration of refugees returning from the camps. The project was funding the construction of vital infrastructure, including roads and a university. Morocco saw it as an obligation to invest in the well-being of its entire population, which was the opposite of a colonial approach.

58. **Mr. El Ouali** (Association 9 mars) said that he wished to debunk the lies the Fourth Committee had heard for years regarding the Sahara region to the east of the defensive wall constructed by Morocco to prevent terrorist incursions. The Frente Polisario referred to that

area as the "liberated territories" in an attempt to deceive the people living in the Tindouf camps but, in reality, it was aware that it had not liberated or claimed that territory. If the Frente Polisario had taken that area it would surely have relocated its camps there rather than allowing them to remain on borrowed foreign soil. Yet it had not done so: first, because the Frente Polisario had never been free to make its own decisions and its sleeping partners wanted it to remain in its current location, under their control; and secondly, because the Frente Polisario had not won that land in armed combat. Morocco had voluntarily withdrawn its military presence to place that buffer zone under the control of MINURSO. The truth of the matter was further evidenced by the secret withdrawal of Frente Polisario militias from Guerguerat in April 2017 introduced there illegally shortly before without defending it as its own liberated territory. However, as a Moroccan Saharan he would defend the territorial integrity of the Sahara, which, he pledged, would always remain Moroccan.

59. **Ms. Obenshain** (American Moroccan Alliance) said that, on the basis of her research and observations, the best opportunity for true representation of the Sahrawis was the Moroccan autonomy plan. Morocco had already started implementing the plan: Sahrawi men and women living in Western Sahara within the borders of Morocco went about their daily lives, raised children, got an education, worked for better jobs and participated in self-governance. Yet, many of those very Sahrawis, who felt deep allegiance to Morocco and expressed fear for loved ones who had not escaped the Tindouf camps where torture allegedly took place, as well as many other Sahrawis holding official positions throughout Morocco would be excluded from having a voice in self-determination under the restrictive eligibility requirements of the referendum advocated by the Frente Polisario, even though their heritage was the same as those still living elsewhere in Western Sahara or in the oppression of the camps.

60. **Mr. El Baihi** (Forum Social pour le Développement Humain de Laayoune) said that he had witnessed the embezzlement by the Frente Polisario and its sponsors of humanitarian assistance intended for the Tindouf camp population, having worked in the delivery of aid from ports in Oran to the camps. Camp residents hoped that donor organizations would learn the lessons of those scandals and oversee the direct distribution of aid to its rightful recipients. Fewer than one third of the trucks transporting aid reached the camps, while the remaining two thirds were redirected to other destinations. Frente Polisario leaders would seize the best of the aid that did reach the camps and sell the bulk of it on the black market in neighbouring countries. The remainder was then distributed to segments of the camp population on the basis of such unjust standards as tribal affiliation, ties to Frente Polisario leaders and allegiance to camp officials. Obtaining even a modest share of aid involved bargaining, extortion and pressure, all used by Frente Polisario officials to punish anyone who had the temerity to oppose their policies.

61. The publication of the OLAF report exposing embezzlement had not put an end to the fraud, as evidenced by the recent scandal involving a prominent Spanish researcher and advocate of the so-called Sahrawi question who had stolen over 700,000 euros allocated to implement development projects in the Tindouf camps. The camp population was tired of reports and promises and needed the General Assembly to take a firm stance against such abuses. In closing, he stressed that the Sahara was and would remain an integral part of Morocco and its heritage.

62. **Ms. Metton**, speaking in her personal capacity as a lawyer at the Paris Bar, said that Morocco was blocking the effective implementation of United Nations principles and resolutions and was preventing the Sahrawi people from exercising their right to self-determination.

63. As defence lawyer for the Gdim Izik political prisoners at their trial in Rabat, she had personally been subjected to the repressive policies of Morocco when she had forcibly been expelled from the courtroom for raising the taboo subject of torture. Recalling the confirmation in 2016 by the United Nations Committee against Torture that one of the Gdim Izik prisoners had been tortured and convicted on the basis of a confession obtained under torture, she detailed the methods of torture to which all her Sahrawi clients had been subjected in one form or another while in prison, ranging from repeated anal rape to nail-pulling, wrist-suspensions, severe beatings, burnings, taunts and threats. The sole goal of torture was to dehumanize and destroy the person, and therefore it was and should be banned everywhere.

64. Moreover, since Western Sahara was, legally, an occupied Territory, any violence committed against the Sahrawi people was a violation of the Geneva Conventions. It was, furthermore, the only Territory on the list of Non-Self-Governing Territories that had no administering Power and the only one to be experiencing such widespread violence against a people engaged in a peaceful struggle. Thus, it was imperative that the United Nations ensure that self-determination took place in Western Sahara in accordance with fundamental human rights and international humanitarian law.

65. **Mr. Dos Santos** (Friends Solidarity of West Sahara in Timor-Leste) said that his own country, Timor-Leste, had, like Western Sahara, fought during long decades of occupation to obtain the people's right to express their will freely through a referendum. Western Sahara, however, remained in a state of incomplete decolonization since Morocco had sabotaged the promised referendum. In the meantime, though not the de jure administering Power, Morocco and certain Western countries had been illegally exploiting the Territory's natural resources and should be banned from doing so. Spain, as the former colonial Power, and the United Nations had a duty to ensure that the two parties to the dispute resumed dialogue, complied with the relevant resolutions and allowed the Sahrawi people to exercise their right to self-determination as soon as possible. Without a referendum, the Sahrawi people would remain stateless and some would continue to live in refugee camps where the living conditions could only deteriorate. It was thus urgent for the United Nations to increase its funding to provide decent sanitation, education and health care in the camps. The Committee as well should use its moral authority to fight for the future of the entire Sahrawi people.

66. **Mr. Vargas Osorio** (Observatorio de la Democracia), emphasizing that he was giving his objective expert opinion, said that the United Nations played a unique role in providing a neutral forum where the parties themselves could resolve their differences and their sovereignty would be respected. The United Nations should ensure that the forum not be used as a theatre where voice was given, through spokesmen for the Frente Polisario, to meddling third countries with Marxist ideologies and corrupt dictatorial regimes of their own, who had been inciting an artificial conflict in Western Sahara that should have been resolved decades earlier. Furthermore, Western Sahara did not qualify as a colony, and the question thus did not even belong on the Fourth Committee's agenda. It should be the Security Council, under Article XII, paragraph 1, of the Charter of the United Nations, that sought a definitive solution to conflict there, and the Council should not allow the interference of uninvolved bodies or outside countries. All countries that supported the Frente Polisario were countries where the human rights of the populations were blatantly violated, in marked contrast to the experience of those living in the southern provinces of Morocco, where there was political and economic freedom under the rule of law.

67. **Mr. Mohamed**, speaking in his personal capacity, said that he was proud to hail from the Sahrawi refugee camps in Algeria. The United Nations should not allow speakers plainly telling lies to continue speaking. The Frente Polisario had been the sole legitimate representative of the Sahrawi people since before Spain left the Territory in 1973. While he was unable to respond to the allegations he had heard concerning racism, theft and the like, he would continue to demand that the Sahrawi people be allowed to exercise its legitimate rights. If the United Nations failed to take the appropriate action to that end, his people would wrest those rights by any means necessary. His was not a declaration of war but rather one of desperation, as Sahrawis had grown weary to the point of abhorring talk of peace and democracy.

The meeting rose at 6 p.m.